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POPULI

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Looking to Beijing
Thinking Beyond Beijing
Toiling for Equality

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Justice At Last?...

A woman has been elected to the International Court of Justice for the first time since it was set up 49 years ago. Rosalyn Higgins, a professor of international law at the University of London, replaces Judge Robert Yewdall Jennings, who resigned, for a term that expires on 5 February 2000. Higgins began her legal career as an intern at the United Nations Legal Office in 1958. She chairs the Public International Law Advisory Board of the British Institute for International Comparative Law. The Court's 15 judges are elected by the UN General Assembly and Security Council, voting independently. Higgins was elected unanimously in the first round of secret balloting in the Security Council, and won 155 votes in the first ballot of the General Assembly's 185 members. The Court is the UN's principal judicial organ and deals with territorial disputes and all other matters covered by the UN Charter. The Court also rules on all legal questions put to it by UN member states. It is based in The Hague, Netherlands. Some 89 judges have been elected to the Court.

...Perhaps Not.

The United Nations admits that after 50 years in existence, it still appoints far fewer women than men to policy-making positions. A study released last month said the 1945 UN Charter was the first international treaty to refer in specific terms to equal rights for women and men. The commitment to equality was made in an "Open Letter to Women of the World" read at the first General Assembly. "Despite these statements, women are far from gaining equal representation" in the world body, according to the study, an updated edition of *The World's Women*. There are only 12 women in policy-making positions in the UN system now compared with 55 men. Four of the women now serving at the rank of Under Secretary-General are the only women executive heads of agencies at this level in the UN's 50-year history. Nafis Sadik became the first woman to head a major voluntarily-funded UN agency in 1987, when she became executive director of UNFPA. Dennis Halliday, Assistant Secretary-General in the Office of Human Resources Management, told Inter Press Service there are about 15,000 UN staffers worldwide, of whom about 8,000 are based in New York. "The gender balance in terms of our professional colleagues is some 33 per cent women," he said. Last year, Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali said he hoped to achieve a 50-50 balance between men and women by the turn of the century. But he also pointed out that one of the reasons there are few women at policy-making positions is that member states do not nominate women for these vacancies. Women made up only 20 per cent of member states' delegations to the General Assembly, with the highest proportion among delegations from Caribbean countries. Only two of the 49 individuals elected to preside over the General Assembly have been women: Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit of India in 1953 and Angie Brooks of Liberia in 1969. Until the end of 1994, there had been 36 U.N. peace and security operations. But almost no women have served on military peacekeeping staffs. Of the 6,205 troops contributed from 1957-1979, only five were women. Between 1989 and 1992, the number of women rose to 255: a little more than one per cent.

Confronting the Church

As he embarks on his second term in office, Peruvian President Alberto Fujimori is again confronting the Roman Catholic Church over family planning. In his inauguration speech, delivered in July, he announced his government would make family planning services available to low-income Peruvians as part of its campaign to fight poverty. He said state involvement would ensure that families with low income and low education would have the same access to modern contraceptives as the upper classes. But he denied that abortion, which is illegal but available at a price, would be part of the "aggressive" campaign, according to the Associated Press. The speech set off alarms within the church hierarchy. The Peruvian Bishops Conference issued a letter saying "artificial" contraception was "morally unacceptable." The controversy also has dismayed some in the ruling coalition, among them members of the conservative Catholic group Opus Dei. This is not the first time Fujimori has raised the issue of family planning. A similar effort nearly two years ago ran into a wall of opposition from the bishops. Since then, however, Fujimori has been reelected by an overwhelming margin to another five-year term and maintains an approval rating of around 65 per cent. Although Peru is 90 per cent Roman Catholic, a poll last year showed that many Peruvians supported Fujimori's position on family planning the first time he raised the issue. No more recent surveys were available.

Consenting Posture

The distributor of Norplant in the United States has volunteered to do what regulators wanted five years ago—require that women sign consent forms before having the long-term contraceptive implants placed in their arms surgically, according to press reports. Before approving the contra-

ceptive in 1990, the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) attempted to ensure women were fully aware of Norplant's potential drawbacks, and that the implants also would have to be removed surgically, but abandoned the effort in the face of stiff resistance from distributor Wyeth-Ayerst Laboratories. In doing so, the FDA overturned the recommendations of its own medical experts, according to confidential documents obtained under the Freedom of Information Act and records under court seal examined by the *Cleveland Plain Dealer* newspaper. Ruth Mercatz, director of the FDA's Office of Women's Health, said Wyeth agreed informed consent was necessary because Norplant is "a long-term contraceptive, and a woman does not have the control in her hands totally to reverse the effects. Other forms of contraception you can stop on your own, but this requires a surgical procedure." Asked why the FDA backed down five years ago, FDA officials declined comment because the matter involved records not open to the public. Norplant reached the US market in 1991 with the suggestion that doctors counsel patients before implanting the drug. "Nothing made such counselling mandatory," the *Plain Dealer* noted. Since 1991, the newspaper reports, Norplant has become the subject of some 160 lawsuits. Similar consent procedures had been mandated for two intrauterine devices, making them less of a target for lawsuits, which had increased in the 1980s following medical complaints from women. For its part, Wyeth-Ayerst stresses that the product is safe, effective, and reversible and points out that literature accompanying the drug warns of the possibility of migraines, irregular periods, blood clots, and other side effects.

Correction

The article on migration appearing on page 7 of the March 1995 issue of POPULI paraphrased an official of the International Organization for Migration as saying that by "most estimates, more than 125 million people uprooted themselves last year." In fact, this figure, taken from Chapter X of the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD), refers to the stock, or cumulative total, of migrants in the world in 1994, not the flow of migrants in that year. We regret this mistake.

Muslim Unity: Women's 'Bottom Line'

Women lawmakers from 35 Muslim countries ended a three-day conference in Islamabad, Pakistan last month reaffirming their belief that Islam preaches equality between the sexes. They issued a statement upholding Islam as a religion of tolerance and blamed widespread discrimination against women on archaic traditions and ignorance. The 120 delegates joined in condemning rape as a weapon of war. They called on the international community "to spare no effort to alleviate the sufferings of...our sisters [who] are being subjected to violence, genocide, occupation, and aggression." They also vowed to "counter terrorism in all its forms in Islamic societies and to promote harmony and tolerance amongst the believers of various religions." The legislators quashed an attempt by Sudanese delegates to include a conservative code of conduct in the final statement. Commenting on the debate, chief Egyptian delegate Horeya Megahed told the Associated Press: "Our differences are our blessings." At the end of the day, conference vice-chair Janat Mukwaya of Uganda said she had discovered one thing: "It is much easier to work through women to unite the Muslim world than through men....Women have a bottom line on everything."

Real Estate Boom

The proportion of mortgages held solely by women in Britain more than doubled between 1983 and 1994, with women now accounting for more than 17 per cent of mortgages—a share close to that held solely by men, according to the Central Statistical Office. Once they buy their own houses, women are more likely than men to own telephones, freezers, and microwave ovens, but less likely to own compact disc players, video recorders, and motor vehicles. One woman in three performs her own household repairs. The statistics also show that nearly eight in 10 women had a bank account in 1993 and two-thirds had a building society account. Older women tend to invest in premium bonds, held by 28 per cent of all women, while younger women are more likely to invest in mortgage and non-mortgage endowment policies—each held by about a quarter of women. Although women outnumber men in part-time employment, more women work full time than work part time. Earnings remain below equivalent male wages, and peak at the age of 35, compared with 45 for men, as a result of career breaks which cause earning power to fall. Overall, however, social change is probably greater than total figures imply. As a result of life expectancy patterns there are relatively large numbers of elderly women. One in 10 women is now aged over 75, and women outnumber men in that age bracket by three to one. Such women are generally single, mostly widowed, have low income, and rely heavily on state benefits.

Hope eternal, reality ephemeral

Women spend half to three-fourths of their childbearing years trying to avoid pregnancy. They need help, according to the United States-based Alan Guttmacher Institute.

If a woman wants to limit the size of her family to two children, she must use some form of effective contraception for at least 20 years; if she wants four children, she must use contraceptives for 16 years. Yet many lack access to modern family planning services.

The not-for-profit corporation specializing in reproductive health research and advocacy last month issued *Hopes and Realities*, a report stating that modern life, economic conditions, women's increased education, and their desire to improve their children's education, have brought women in most countries to want smaller families. Their determination to control their childbearing, often in the face of "substantial barriers," has led to a "dramatic" reduction in family size—in many developing countries, the size of the average family has been halved in the past two decades alone.

"Financial support for family planning programmes from national governments and the international community has played a role in the revolutionary change in family size throughout most of the world," says Jeannie Rosoff, the Institute's president. "Yet it is safe to say that nowhere in the world has the assistance been sufficiently comprehensive, intensive, or sustained to meet the needs of all society, particularly the poor, the uneducated, the young, and rural populations."

Thus, some 230 million women—one in six of reproductive age—lack access to effective reversible contraception and voluntary sterilization, according to the report. Although the gap between the number of children women say they want and actually have has narrowed, it remains "sizeable," the report states. Of 190 million pregnancies worldwide each year, more than one in four end in abortion.

The report's findings are based on data from the worldwide Demographic and Health Surveys conducted by Macro International, another US-based research organization, in collaboration with national governments.

Poverty, marriage at a young age, early childbearing, insufficient education, and inequalities between women and men "severely limit women's ability to contribute to, and take advantage of, social and economic progress," according to an Institute statement.

Then there are the men. They "have substantial influence on the number of children women bear, yet they rarely assume responsibility for contraception," according to the Institute. In a report geared towards a general readership but more specifically intended for policy- and decision-makers, the absence of statistics on male contraceptive use; examination of the specific ways in which men influence family size and the weight of that influence; or analysis of existing policies and efforts to address the problem may be indication of the scant responsibility men have assumed. Alternatively, as feminist analysts and activists have pointed out, keeping the focus on women lets men off the hook.

For more information regarding the report, *Hopes and Realities: Closing the Gap Between Women's Aspirations and Their Reproductive Experiences*, contact: The Alan Guttmacher Institute, 120 Wall Street, 21st floor, New York, NY 10005, USA. Tel.: (212) 248-1111. Fax: (212) 248-1952. E-mail: <102127.1701@compuserv.com>.

Chieko Ishikawa

Man accepts responsibility: Hope or reality?

"Micro-lending":

Kinder, gentler banking?

Spurred by growing attention to women's roles in reducing poverty—and criticism for doing more harm than good in this area—donors are pledging US$ 150 million in credits for "micro-lending" programmes to women.

The effort to provide poor women with small amounts of credit—as little as US$ 100 each—is being led by a new institution called the Consultative Group to Assist the Poorest (CGAP), housed at the World Bank's headquarters in Washington, DC.

CGAP got its start at the end of June when bilateral and multilateral donors pledged US$ 200 million in cash and other support for micro-lending programmes in developing countries. Of the total, about US$ 150 million will be earmarked for poor women, the Bank, which chairs CGAP, said.

Mobilization of these funds is taking place on the eve of the Fourth World Conference on Women. Among other issues to be taken up by delegates there are how to achieve equality between men and women in their access to credit and property and how to improve the lives of the estimated 550 million rural women who live in absolute poverty.

Micro-lending is considered especially effective because the money reaches the world's poorest people directly, without requiring extensive paper work, collateral, and other formalities which the poor generally cannot provide, according to Jean-Francois Rischard, the Bank's vice president for finance and private sector development.

The best-known and most successful of micro-lending projects is found in Bangladesh, where Grameen Bank has provided small loans to almost two million women since it opened its doors in 1976. Grameen, founded and directed by Muhammed Yunus, lends out average loans of only US$ 100 at market rates of interest, far lower than usurious rates often charged by local money-lenders. To be eligible, a woman without assets must join a group of other women, of whom only two can borrow at first. When those two start to repay their loans, two more can borrow, and so on. The only collateral is the group's agreement to repay the loans. Clients also must agree to increase their savings, observe sound nutritional practices, educate their children, and boycott the traditional dowry system.

Social pressure helps account for a 97 per cent repayment record—far higher than repayment rates for poor men and wealthy borrowers in Bangladesh, according to recent studies.

Fifty per cent of Grameen's women clients have set up livestock and poultry raising enterprises, while 25 percent have entered the processing or manufacturing fields, and the rest trading and shopkeeping.

The scheme not only provides poor women access to credit, but also enables them to enter the mainstream economy, something which hundreds of imported poverty programmes have largely failed to do.

While Bangladesh has the most developed micro-lending programme, the same model with some variations has been applied in Africa, Latin America, and even the United States, where the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) helped introduce it into poor urban communities just two years ago.

The World Bank has been a latecomer to micro-lending, in part because its mandate permits it to lend to governments only and because of a long-time bias in favour of big projects and formal sectors of the economy. It has also come under fire from grassroots critics, including Grameen Bank's Yunus himself, for structural adjustment policies which they say hit the poor, especially women, hardest.

At a Bank-sponsored conference on hunger in December 1993, Yunus took the World Bank to task on a range of issues. He charged that, despite the Bank's rhetoric, it "does not assign any urgency or primacy to poverty alleviation." While it was quick to adopt such rhetoric, he said, its actual poverty work amounted only to "humanitarian add-ons, like safety nets."

He also charged that the Bank failed to offer responsibility to its clients. "They give you money. They give you all the ideas, expertise, and everything else. Your job is to follow the yellow lines, the green lines, the red lines. They don't want to leave out any responsibility for the borrower, except for the failure of the project." The Grameen Bank, he said, had a completely different philosophy.

Despite the criticism, the World Bank announced at the 1993 conference that it would contribute US$2 million to a trust fund to promote micro-lending and has since tried to assume leadership in the field by creating CGAP and contributing US$ 30 million from a special trust fund and its own profits.

Yet the US$ 150 million dollars it has helped raise will make only a small dent in the growing numbers of poor women in many regions. The Bank estimates the money should provide lending for an estimated 750,000 women annually. Assuming a high repayment rate, 7.5 million women should benefit over ten years.

The Bank and its affiliates lend more than US$ 20 billion a year, US$ 6 billion of it to the world's poorest nations.

Chieko Ishikawa

Better borrowers than businessmen.

Mohini Malhotra of the Bank's private sector development department says the Bank has begun to "mainstream" micro-lending in its regular programmes. CGAP will help determine "how to do it better," she said. She added that the Bank "recognizes that you have to work at (both) the macro and micro levels. I see this as a necessary partnership with structural adjustment," she added.

Yunus himself is now far more enthusiastic. He hailed last month's pledging session as "the most significant event in the world of micro-finance," but cautioned that "it will be important to make special efforts to ensure that CGAP reaches the bottom-most poor people." He has agreed to chair a panel of experts that will advise the new body.

In addition to the World Bank, major multilateral donors at June's pledging meeting included the African and Asian Development Banks, the International Fund for Agricultural Development, and the UN Development Programme. While it did not take an active role at the session, the Inter-American Development Bank is also planning to collaborate, according to Malhotra. Major bilateral donors include Canada, France, the Netherlands, and USAID.

-Jim Lobe/IPS

Bangladesh:

Capital offenses

Bangladesh has enacted a law that provides the death penalty for killing or raping women and trafficking in women and children.

Home Minister Abdul Matin Chowdhury, who piloted the "Repression against Women and Children (special provision)" bill that became law in July, says crimes against women have sharply escalated in the country and existing laws have proved insufficient to deal with them.

The new act also prescribes the death penalty for causing serious damage to the eyes or face or deforming any part of a woman's body by throwing corrosive substances. Men often throw acid on women's faces to punish them for rejecting suitors' advances or otherwise displeasing male members of the society. But the most rampant of crimes against women is the killing and torture of those who bring dowries deemed insufficient by their in-laws.

A high premium is placed on dowry as a method for economic advancement that is both painless and quick—for the groom and his family. Although updated figures are not available, police records show that at least 300 women were killed by their husbands or in-laws for bringing insufficient dowries during 1992 and 1993.

Law enforcers concede that only a minuscule percentage of dowry deaths actually make it to police records, however. According to the Bangladesh Marriage Registrars' Association, more than 200,000 marriages break up every year over dowry demands, husbands torturing their wives, husbands taking on second or third wives, or the failure of husbands to maintain their families. What's more, it is believed as many as nine in ten marriages in rural areas are not registered.

Religious revivalism in the villages has also led to the growing clout of local clerics who pass humiliating sentences on women if they dare to step out of predetermined roles. Women in increasing numbers have been using credit facilities offered by non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and the Grameen Bank to set up small businesses that increase their economic strength. Conservative clerics frown

upon these activities and often prescribe public whipping for women on some pretext or the other to discourage them.

These punishments are not sanctioned by the formal laws of the country, but their impact is no less real: Records show that in the past three years, more than 40 girls and housewives have committed suicide after being thus humiliated.

Anti-trafficking measures

Trafficking in women is also a major problem. By some estimates, an average of 500 young women are smuggled out of Bangladesh every month and sold into prostitution in neighbouring countries. Many are believed to abandon their homes willingly, lured by the promise of lucrative jobs. Some 10,000 under-aged Bangladeshi girls are languishing in brothels in Pakistan, according to one report from the United Nations Children's Fund.

Under the new law, a special tribunal called the Special Women and Children Repression Court will be set up in each district. The courts are tasked with dealing with cases of violence against women within 90 working days.

Officials say the new law has not faced any opposition so far for prescribing capital punishment for the most severe of these crimes. Others question the law's impact, however. As one woman lawyer told Inter Press Service on condition of anonymity: "The new law will only add to the old ones that have been enacted for the protection of women and are honoured more in the breach than in the observance."

Rasheeda Chowdhury, director of the Association of Development Agencies in Bangladesh (ADAB), says laws, though important, can only go so far in the first place. "It is not so much a legal problem as a social one that has to do with male attitudes towards women. In our society women are looked down upon as secondary human beings and as second-class citizens."

Women in the World Economy:

Making more, earning less

It will hardly come as news to women to learn that despite the strides they've made in education and health, they find themselves still barred from economic and political power and still earning a mere portion of what equally qualified men earn for equal work. What might come as news to some is where the most significant advances in their status have been made.

The Arab States led the developing countries in closing the gender gap in education and health, more than doubling female literacy between 1970 and 1990, according to this year's Human Development Report from the UN Development Programme.

While the gender gap in education was more than halved in developing countries between 1970 and 1990, women still represent a staggering 70 per cent of the 1.3 billion people living in poverty. The majority below the poverty line, they remain strangers in the corridors of power, on average holding one in ten legislative seats and six in a hundred cabinet positions in national governments.

The current edition pays particular attention to the status of women and uses two new measures of human development: The "Gender-related Development Index" gauges imbalances in basic health, education, and income. The "Gender Empowerment Measure" evaluates nations' progress in advancing women at the political and economic level. Predictably, the Nordic countries place highest on both ladders.

Nevertheless, even by the basic measure of income, women earn less than men. The average wage for women in the United States is only about three-fourths of the male wage. For 55 countries where data were available, women's wages in industrialized countries ranged from 91 per cent of men's wages in Australia to 63 per cent in Canada. Among developing countries, the average women's wage ranged from 92 per cent of men's wages in Tanzania to 42 per cent in Bangladesh.

In contrast, "if women's unpaid work were properly valued, it is quite possible that women would emerge in most societies as the major breadwinners—or at least equal breadwinners—since they put in longer hours of work than men....women's work remains grossly unpaid, unrecognized, and undervalued, on the order of US$ 11 trillion a year," according to a UNDP statement.

Most telling, the report estimates that the cost of providing social services to women in every developing country would come to around US$20 billion a year. Were this level of funding to be committed, it would still only amount to roughly five per cent of the total size of public sector budgets in developing countries today.

For more information about the *Human Development Report 1995*, published in English by Oxford University Press, contact: United Nations Development Programme, One UN Plaza, New York, NY 10017, USA. Tel.: (212) 906-5000. Fax: (212) 906-5001. Internet: <HQ@undp.org>.

The key to food security

Greater equality for farm women in developing countries could help boost food production and prevent malnutrition among children, according to a report from the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI).

"If women were given the same resources as men, developing countries would see significant increases in agricultural productivity," according to Agnes Quisumbing, principal author of the report, *Women: The Key to Food Security.*

"Reforms are needed on several fronts, from education and training to land ownership."

The report is an effort to condense the flood of recent data on women's roles in food production, preparation, and consumption in 15 developing countries. It finds that women must still overcome countless barriers to achieve their full potential as both food producers and as caretakers of children in the countryside.

The report cites UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) figures showing that women account for more than half of the labour needed to produce the food consumed in developing countries. In Africa, the proportion rises to as much as three-fourths.

"Though men receive most of the agricultural extension services and new technologies, women are the caretakers of the food supply in developing countries," Quisumbing says.

Despite women's importance in growing food, they usually have few or no rights to the land they till. Such insecurity, according to the report, reduces the chances of their adopting environmentally sustainable agricultural practices and impedes their ability to obtain credit. Women also own or have access to fewer tools than men, and, until recently, most new technology and machinery was inappropriate for women's needs.

At the same time as they exclude women, extension and research programmes rarely take advantage of women's indigenous knowledge about seeds and growing systems.

The fact that women leave school earlier than men also poses a barrier to their productivity on the farm. "Underinvestment in women's education has high opportunity costs in terms of forgone agricultural output and incomes," according to Quisumbing. "Better-educated farmers are more likely to adopt new technologies."

A growing body of evidence suggests that if men and women had equal access to agricultural inputs, such as fertilizer and technologies, gains in output could be substantial. One study found that yields among Kenya's women farmers could increase by 9-24 per cent if women had the same experience, education, and access to inputs as men.

The IFPRI report also states that addressing gender disparities in other aspects of the rural household could improve the nutrition and health of children.

In Africa, Asia, and Latin America, "women, relative to men, tend to spend their income disproportionately on food for the family," the report says, adding that men generally retain control over a higher proportion of their own incomes for personal use.

Strong gender biases also favour males in decisions about food allocation within households in some regions, most especially South Asia. "Our data show a strong pro-male and pro-adult bias in terms of the quantity of food intake in South Asia, which has detrimental effects on the health and nutritional status of women and girls," says Quisumbing.

Women also have less time in the day that is not devoted to food production, preparation, and related tasks, such as fetching water and fuel wood. In one five-country study, time recorded in direct child care was generally less than one hour a day.

"Women constantly face trade-offs in their time allocation decisions," Quisumbing told Inter Press Service. "During times of economic hardship, the burden of adjustment is often assumed by women. They absorb shocks to household welfare by expanding their already tightly stretched working day and by sacrificing their own portions of food for children...often to the detriment of [their] own health and nutrition." But better-nourished mothers tend to have healthier infants and children who, in turn, can offer a more productive future for poor families, according to the report.

Marie Dorigny

Feeding the world.

Hammering Out Victory

by Nitya Rao

For years, the stone quarries in the southern Indian state of Tamil Nadu's Pudukkottai district were run by a syndicate of local contractors who exploited their workers, mined illegally, and conspired to underpay the government for the use of the state-owned quarries.

Then, five years ago, Sheela Chunkath, the collector of Pudukkottai, made a dramatic decision: The district administration would lease the quarries to the area's women workers.

The decision provoked a prolonged legal and political conflict with the contractors, who reacted vigorously against the threat to the vast profits they had made on the backs of their workers.

Recently, however, the women won a major battle after years of uncertainty when Tamil Nadu's chief minister announced their leases would be extended for another five years. The announcement was timely relief for the women quarry workers and an affirmation of the state's commitment to the empowerment of poor women.

"Our prolonged struggle has at last yielded some results," said an elated Manikkathai, secretary of the Pudukkottai district workers' society, which represents the quarry women.

Pudukkottai, one of the least developed districts in India, has some 450 stone quarries. For years, they were leased out to contractors who bid for the use of the quarries at annual auctions. They paid the migrant and local women who worked for them a pittance, virtually turning them into bonded labor.

But in 1991, none of the contractors bid the minimum price that had been set by the district administration for the use of the quarries. Chunkath decided then that the women workers should have direct access to the quarries. Under her supervision, the more than 3,000 women were organized into working groups of 15-20 each and were given loans to buy their own tools.

With the help of a visionary district official, women are breaking rocks and building a future for themselves and their community.

The result was a significant increase in the women's earnings—in some cases, from the equivalent of 25 US cents to around 80 cents a day.

Their increased earnings boosted their self-confidence, their mobility, and their participation in the decision-making process in their homes and in the wider community. It also earned them new respect from their husbands.

Rani, a quarry worker in Ilayavyal village, said her husband began to help her with the household chores when she started earning more money. "I have been able to repay the loan [to buy tools] only with the active assistance of my husband," she said. "He is supportive and also helps with the collection of fuel wood and caring for the children."

The women also received training in group management and other basic skills, so that they would be able to work independently of the contractors. But they have had to fight a continuous battle

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with the contractors, who challenged their right to use the quarries.

Initially, the contractors tried to use intimidation and the threat of force to re-establish their position. "The contractors threatened to kill us if we dared to step into the quarries, and actually hired goons for the purpose," said Solai, a quarry worker. "They said they had incurred the initial expenditure for blasting the hill and the stone belonged to them."

But Chunkath arranged for protection. "With the collector's support, we secured police protection, worked, and got the stone removed," Solai said.

Next, the truck-owners, who had close ties to the contractors, refused to lift or transport the quarried stone. Again, Chunkath stepped in to arrange alternative transportation to ship the stone.

Eventually, however, Chunkath was transferred out of the district. Less than a year after the groups were organized, the government also increased fivefold the fee payable on each truckload of stones removed from the quarry. For the women's groups, this meant a drastic reduction in their earnings as the market price for stone did not keep up with the increased cost of extracting it.

The contractors, however, were unaffected, since they had paid a lump sum for the lease at the time of auction and were not obligated to pay the seignorage fee. Meanwhile, they deliberately kept the price of stone low, hoping to drive the women out of business.

Several contractors also challenged the legitimacy of the district policy in court, arguing that proper procedures had not been followed in the allotment of leases to the women. The court issued stay orders which prevented 20 of the work groups from starting work in quarries that had been allotted to them.

In the most recent assault on the project, several state legislators made an effort to remove a provision in the Tamil Nadu Minor Mineral Concession Rules, 1959, that gives priority to labour cooperatives in the allotment of leases.

Added to these problems are the already existing constraints the women workers face: limited skills, lack of access to and control over credit, lack of access to markets and other productive resources, lack of awareness of the legislative and legal processes.

But the chief minister's decision to extend the leases has breathed new life into the threatened scheme, which was part of India's Integrated Rural Development Programme.

And the women, confident in their abilities, are optimistic about their chances. Manikkathai, whose workers' society offers support for each of the small women's cooperatives, exulted in the news. "Now," she said, "the responsibility of organizing and coordinating the groups rests with us."

Viviane Moos

Sex for Sale, Not Women

by Avian Joseph and Amy Louise Kazmin

Every month, several hundred women from all over the Caribbean apply for a job at Le Mirage.

Established 50 years ago following consultations with the minister of health, the police chief, and the local clergy, Le Mirage is a government-licensed brothel in Curacao, the Netherlands Antilles. It stands at the top end of the region's sex industry.

Pimps and other middle-men are not allowed at Le Mirage. The women, who stay for three months at a time, keep all the money they earn after paying for food and lodging. They are allowed to work here for up to three months a year, during which time they receive weekly medical check-ups. When it comes time to leave Le Mirage at the end of their stints, many stop at Curacao's free trade zone to buy electrical goods which they re-sell at home to boost their income further.

It is a far cry from the conditions faced by most prostitutes in the Caribbean.

Pushed into the sex trade by a lack of education and economic opportunity, most prostitutes endure exploitation and abuse from their pimps, clients, and local authorities. They ply their trade in rundown guest houses or walk dangerous city streets in search of clients. In Haiti, when the American military intervened to restore President Jean Bertrand Aristide to power, pimps allowed soldiers to "feel out" prostitutes through fences as they haggled over prices.

"It was like a marketplace," one soldier recalled. "You had a chance to feel the commodity before purchasing."

Now, as Caribbean women's groups prepare for the upcoming Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, empowering women who work in the sex industry is one of their primary concerns.

"Police persecution of women and girl sex workers must end," according to a report prepared by a coalition of Caribbean non-governmental organizations (NGOs) for the Beijing conference. "Women sex workers must be respected."

For Caribbean women's groups heading to Beijing, the empowerment of women in the sex industry is a primary concern.

In the report, feminist groups call for police to stop arresting and harassing prostitutes. Instead, they maintain, authorities should prosecute pimps and other traffickers who victimize and exploit women in the sex trade.

The report advocates the development of shelters and other support services to help sex workers as well as women who want to escape from the sex industry. Few such services exist.

"As women, we should try to help them out to get a job," says Muriel Douglas, coordinator of Trinidad's National AIDS Programme. "Through education, they can be empowered to develop skills."

In addition to facing exploitation at the hands of male authorities and pimps, sex workers are at high risk for contracting AIDS. But Douglas says that many prostitutes avoid health clinics, where they could learn about safe sex practices, for fear of drawing

Avian Joseph and Amy Louise Kazmin are correspondents for Women's Feature Service.

Viviane Moos

Taking chances.

attention to themselves. "If we show them empathy and openness, they will open up," she said.

From the squalid brothels of Port-Au-Prince, to the beaches of Antigua, to the government-licensed sex establishment in Curacao, the Caribbean sex trade is dominated by women from the Dominican Republic. Dominican women are also found working as prostitutes in many European countries. They are pushed into the sex trade by high rates of illiteracy, a lack of job opportunities, and a profoundly macho culture.

A study conducted by the Dominican-based Centre of Investigation for Feminist Action (CIPFA) estimates that as many as 40,000 Dominican women earn their living as prostitutes inside their own country. An additional 50,000 are in Holland, Greece, Spain, other European countries, and elsewhere in the Caribbean. Oleida Acosta, a Dominican activist, says most of the women are migrants from rural areas, where they generally are not allowed to own land. Initially, they move to the city in search of other work. But when they cannot find jobs, many resort to selling sex.

The situation has been exacerbated by a structural adjustment programme which has resulted in widespread unemployment. High rates of population growth also means that many young girls are pushed into the sex industry to support parents and siblings.

About a quarter of those who go abroad as sex workers make their first trip before they are 15 years old, according to the CIPFA study. Once they go, especially to Europe, they are often held in appalling conditions from which it is difficult for them to escape.

Within the Caribbean, Dominican women are highly sought after. In Haiti, Dominican women command nearly 10 times the fees of their Haitian counterparts. Joseph Julien, director of the Celeste Casimir Medico-Social Centre, says Haitian men prefer the looks of the Dominicans that resemble European standards of beauty more closely than do black Haitian women's looks.

Clorindre Zephir, coordinator of the National and International Documentation and Information Centre for Haitian Women, also says that Haitian men cling to a romantic notion that Spanish—which is spoken in the Dominican Republic—is the language of love.

In Port-au-Prince, Dominicans account for an estimated 90 per cent of the women in the approximately 40 brothels. Most Dominican women who work in Haiti spend several months accumulating money, then return home for a while. Some women commute back and forth between Haiti and the Dominican Republic for several years, or visit other countries.

Experts from the United Nations also are calling for measures to provide adequate employment for Caribbean

women as an alternative to the sex industry.

A report prepared for the Beijing conference by the UN's Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean calls for sustainable measures to alleviate poverty, among them "development in rural zones to reduce internal migration and provide an adequate quality of life to women who work as producers, processors, farmers, and traders."

But while the debates and discussions drag on, the number of girls and women entering the sex trade continues to grow.

Caribbean feminists acknowledge that they must overcome their own prejudices if they are to be able to truly assist women in the sex industry. In their report, they call for dialogue and coalition-building between sex workers and other working women's groups.

"We as members of the women's movement in the region need to address problems of racism and our own prejudices against prostitutes," the NGO report states.

Douglas agrees. "As long as a woman is a sex worker we tend to cast judgement," she says. "We should not. In most cases their life story is pathetic."

India: Demanding Law's Protection

A group of sex workers in the eastern Indian city of Calcutta is demanding the legalization and licensing of their trade, according to the Press Trust of India and United Press International.

The Mahila Samanyaya, or Equality for Women Committee, which represents many of the city's prostitutes, is calling for legal sanction of the profession as protection against harassment by police, the local mafia, and landlords.

"If the profession could be legalized in Switzerland and most Scandinavian countries, there is no question why it should not be accorded legal sanction here," says Committee spokesperson Sadhana Mukherjee, adding that making prostitution legal would help the government control child prostitution. Granting legal status for prostitution would also help slow the spread of AIDS by allowing regular health examinations and blood tests for the city's growing number of prostitutes, Mukherjee says. The Committee is preparing a draft proposal on the matter to be presented to India's social welfare ministry, she says.

In support of their arguments, activists cite a recent World Health Organization report which estimated that 2-3 million people in India were infected with HIV, the human immunodeficiency virus. They note that the report said conservative social values make it difficult to carry out AIDS awareness and education campaigns, resulting in India's having one of the fastest-growing HIV-infected populations in the world.

Viviane Moos

Thinking Past Beijing

by Tafadzwa Mumba

It is not the Beijing conference that most African women's non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are apprehensive about. For the majority, the real challenge lies in ensuring that strategies from the encounter are implemented by their governments.

"We are hoping that the Beijing conference will be different in that there will be a definite commitment on the part of governments," says Florence Butegwa of Women in Law and Development in Africa (WILDAF). "NGOs have seen what happened after the Nairobi Forward Looking Strategies and are determined to have in place strategies that will monitor what takes place after Beijing."

The Nairobi Forward Looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women were the culmination of the Third World Conference on Women, held in 1985 in the Kenyan capital.

The Nairobi document aimed to provide a framework for action at the national, regional, and international levels to promote the empowerment of women and the enjoyment of human rights. But, as women's rights activist Joyce Kazembe notes, most of the Nairobi recommendations have yet to be implemented.

"I think we need to be a little more serious than after Nairobi," Kazembe says. "We devised the Forward Looking Strategies and are supposed to have made sure the recommendations — based on equality — were implemented. But somewhere along the line they got lost."

African women maintain that governments have chosen to turn a deaf ear to the chain of world conferences and conventions whose platforms of action have repeatedly stated the need for governments to recognize the particular rights of women.

According to WILDAF's Everjoyce Win, governments keep taking them back to the drawing board as if issues like violence against women and reproductive rights are new concerns when, in fact, they were topical at the World Conference on Human Rights, held in Vienna in 1993, and at the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development, held in Cairo.

Indeed, many governments approved both the Vienna and Cairo documents and ratified the 1990 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women.

"It's just a question of rehashing the old stuff," says Win.

The problem, according to Priscilla Misihayirambi, coordinator of the Women and AIDS Support Network, lies in the wording of platforms of action which is often not action-oriented. Instead of phrases such as 'governments should do' or 'agree to' certain proposed actions, she says, the wording in the final Platform for Action adopted at Beijing should spur governments into action.

African women's NGOs expect 'a clear commitment by governments to give women what is due to them as their right, not as a favour.'

"The major problem has been that governments have just paid lip service to conventions and platforms of action. For a lot of women's movements, Beijing should be able to teach us whether or not we really need these types of international conferences," says Misihayirambi.

Tafadzwa Mumba is a correspondent for Inter Press Service Third World News Agency.

At the Southern African Pre-Beijing workshop held in June in Lusaka, Zambia, NGOs agreed that lobbying tactics needed to be sharpened to ensure the effective monitoring and implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action. Namibia was tasked with coordinating lobbying strategies for Southern Africa and, where needed, with facilitating training after Beijing.

The heavily bracketed draft Platform for Action was also discussed at a sub-Regional workshop with the major areas of contention being the replacement of 'equity' with 'equality' and bracketed texts on issues such as gender, human rights and freedoms, reproductive rights, and the situation of girls.

The workshop felt that those opposed to these texts favored the maintenance of women's traditional subordination to males which impinges on sexual relations, marriage, and reproductive rights.

With only a month remaining before the Fourth World Conference on Women, African NGOs are trying to patch up final plans and strategies amid fears many of them will not make it to Beijing for want of funds.

According to the New-York based International Women's Tribune Centre, only about 3,000 African NGOs are likely to be among the more than 30,000 worldwide that are expected to be in Beijing. It is believed that the bulk of NGOs — between 14,000 and 16,000—will come from the North.

Still, the mood among African representatives appears upbeat.

'We need to be more serious than after Nairobi. Somewhere along the line the Forward Looking Strategies got lost.'

"We remain optimistic about being heard," says Fadzai Danha, research and training officer for the National Association of Non-governmental Organizations (NANGO) in Zimbabwe.

"We know we are very weak at lobbying compared, for example, with the Europeans, who have the capacities, but we will try our best," says Danha. She adds: "We can only depend on our own rhetoric."

According to Kazembe, although Africa has a "small voice," it is confident of making an impact and being heard through the various networks formed with other continents.

The key to the Beijing conference, says WILDAF's Butegwa, will be making alliances and taking a common position. African NGOs, she adds, also need to understand their own issues and be able to position these issues within the correct sectoral caucuses.

"What I am expecting is to come up with strategies that are implementable rather than coming up with grandiose ideas," she says.

For WILDAF's Win, Africa's women "expect Beijing to come out with a clear commitment by governments to give women what is due to them as their right and not as a favour. As long as that doesn't come through everything done for women will be looked at as a favour."

Marie Dorigny

On the long march to equality, 'we can only depend on our own rhetoric.'

TRANSFORMING GENDER RELATIONS:

Reproductive health makes a difference

by Lynda Chalker

At the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD), held last September in Cairo, Egypt, we agreed on a new approach to population and development—an approach which places individuals at the centre of development and is concerned with meeting their demands.

I do not think that the Cairo approach has yet been widely understood. It has become so familiar to most of us closely involved in authoring and adopting the Cairo Programme of Action that perhaps we tire of repeating it. Yet we must sustain our efforts, especially now, while the declaration to be made in Beijing this month, at the Fourth World Conference on Women, hangs in the balance.

The Beijing conference is about transforming relationships between women and men and empowering women. Those who try to unravel the language agreed at Cairo fail to understand this.

For too long, the world's women have been offered inadequate maternity care, indifferent family planning services, and no treatment at all for sexually transmitted diseases. They have been the target of population control programmes, often associated with coercion, designed solely to restrict the size of their families. Such brutality is unacceptable, whether applied to men or women.

The only sustainable policy is one which enables individuals to choose when and under what circumstances they have children. This means that women must have more control over all aspects of their lives, particularly with respect to sexual relations.

Since Cairo, I have challenged officials within Britain's Overseas Development Administration and in the United Nations system to give substance to the ideas in the Programme of Action. How can they ensure that women and men the world over have more reproductive choice?

It is not enough simply to give more cash to governments. Reproductive health is an area in which no state should interfere in people's private affairs.

Most people want to be responsible for their own reproductive health, getting contraceptives and other requirements confidentially from retailers or doctors they can trust. To take on this responsibility people must have reliable information. They may also need professional help especially in childbirth or in case of sexually transmitted diseases. If any one of us want tubes tied or ducts snipped, we would like the job to be done by people who know what they are doing.

Baroness Chalker is Britain's Minister for Overseas Development and will be jointly leading the British delegation to the Fourth World Conference on Women.

In many developing countries or countries in economic transition, the market still does not respond to people's needs for reproductive healthcare. When it does, quality is uncertain and costs tend to be high. Even fairly-priced services are beyond the means of many who want to use them. Thus, governments do have responsibilities in relation to reproductive health. They have a vital role to play in ensuring that good quality services are accessible, and that people—particularly poor people—can access them. They must be clear about how best they can contribute to meeting people's needs, but not interfere in their affairs. This is very much at the heart of the Cairo Programme of Action, and we must continue to explain its importance and to carry it forward from Cairo to Beijing.

Too many sexual encounters take place without women consenting, under duress, and without protection against pregnancy or infection. The consequences, more often for the woman, may be catastrophic.

This advocacy is not without its problems. Many are disturbed by our enthusiasm for the Cairo Programme of Action. Some seem to believe that this document gives too much emphasis to women's sexuality. But I can assure them that we have not taken leave of our senses.

Sex is an important feature of daily life for women as well as men. This is not for what sex represents in itself, but because of the circumstances under which it takes place and its consequences. Too many sexual encounters take place without women consenting, under duress, and without them being able to take precautions against pregnancy or infection. The consequences, more often for the woman, may be catastrophic.

Work to promote better reproductive health throughout the world is in everyone's interest. It must be a core part of the Beijing Platform for Action.

This is why sexuality had to feature strongly in the Cairo document—and must feature in Beijing. In the Platform for Action for the Beijing conference, sexual and reproductive health should be examined within a framework of gender equality. The Beijing conference is, after all, a conference about transforming the relationships between women and men and empowering women. Those who are trying to unravel the language agreed at Cairo fail to understand this crucial point. Too often, it is lost amid well-orchestrated campaigns against abuses of reproductive rights, most notably in China, which is hosting the Beijing conference, and against abortion rights.

Our opponents claim our efforts promote abortion. But I have made clear my view that abortion must never be promoted as a means of family planning. Indeed, by making it possible for many thousands of women and men to choose if and when to have children, family planning programmes have brought about reductions in abortion rates. Such programmes have also helped to reduce the numbers of people at risk of HIV, the human immunodeficiency virus, and other sexually transmitted infections, through the provision of condoms and medicines on a large scale. And massive investments are being made to make motherhood safer.

Opponents also argue that unless the two leading international family planning organizatións—UNFPA and the International Planned Parenthood Federation—publicly state that they will not operate in China until abuses have ended, Britain and other donors should withdraw our funding from them. But both organizations are trying to influence China's population policies. As Britain's Minister for Overseas Development, I have required them both to demonstrate that they are exerting a positive influence.

I have concluded—reluctantly—that those who attack our policies on this score are not primarily interested in the well-being of women in China. Their aim is for us to discontinue funding for reproductive health activities throughout the world. That is not, I sense, the wish of the majority of parliamentarians—or the general public.

Work to promote better reproductive health throughout the world is very much in everyone's interest. It must be a core part of the Beijing Platform for Action.

THE OTHER HALF'S RIGHTS:

Universal, indivisible, interdependent, interrelated...and in peril

by Shanthi Dairiam

The push to define human rights and to develop consensus around human rights norms has a preeminence today as in no other times. For a long time, human rights issues were considered an internal matter; in consequence, international mechanisms for their protection were insufficient. But now there is a growing consciousness that human rights are inalienable. As Julio Prado Vallejo of the United Nations Human Rights Committee has stated, if people are not accorded their rights, this does not mean that the rights do not exist. It means that they have not been acknowledged and that mechanisms for redress have been inadequate.

The Fourth World Conference on Women is a watershed in the history of the human rights of women. In the last few years, this history has taken us through several world conferences, including the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development held in Rio de Janeiro in 1992; the World Conference on Human Rights held in Vienna in 1993; the International Conference on Population and Development held in Cairo in 1994; and the World Summit for Social Development held in Copenhagen earlier this year.

The Vienna human rights conference is of particular significance. It was here that the community of nations acknowledged, in unequivocal terms, that the human rights "of women and of the girl child are an inalienable, integral, and indivisible part of human rights. The full and equal participation of women in political, civil, economic, social, and international levels and the eradication of all forms of discrimination on the grounds of sex are priority objectives of the international community."

At Vienna, human rights activists gained a political victory. If this victory is to transform the lives of women, however, the many crucial concepts, principles, and methods for the practice of human rights that were affirmed in Vienna need to be reflected and strengthened in the Beijing Platform for Action. After two decades the international community has devoted to women's advancement, their basic human rights remain disputed and therefore in peril.

The human right of women to exercise choice and be agents of economic development has to be legitimized on the arguments of justice, not on those of efficiency or on the instrumental use of women's labour.

The full picture

The Vienna Declaration clearly affirms the universality, indivisibility, interdependence, and interrelatedness of human rights. These concepts should pervade all aspects of the Beijing Platform for Action, from Mission Statement to strategic objectives, and should form the basis for all action for the advancement of women. The Platform needs to address the question of why, despite two decades devoted to the development of women, we are still highlighting the poverty and inferior status of women relative to men. It is time we moved to a different framework. Development services and programmes that are provided in a context that does not

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promote the human rights of women and is not cognizant of the systematic nature of the discrimination against women does not take us far enough. What this does is to address specific physical conditions of women in isolation from the social, economic, political, and civil position of women.

From the time of the 1975 World Plan of Action for Women and the 1985 Forward Looking Strategies, governments and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have been engaging in largely piecemeal action to alleviate certain disadvantages in the conditions of women without attempting to transform the social relationships of gender through which women have been devalued and denied their right to be independent social and economic agents. This has merely meant that attempts to bring about gains for women at one level have created new forms of resistance and disadvantage at another level. For example, programmes that merely provide technical services to address illiteracy or ill health among women will not do enough to alter the health and educational status of women if these programmes ignore the cluster of rights that entitles women to be valued, to be educated, to have access to economic resources, to have the right to good health, to participate in the design of health services, to access those good services, and to have freedom of movement.

A woman's status within the family and the recognition of her right to personal autonomy will determine her right to full citizenship and economic, political, and social capability at the public level.

The Platform for Action therefore has to recognize that rights are universal, that they are interrelated and indivisible and in that sense discrimination is also interrelated. If a woman is not accorded the right to education or the right to be heard, she cannot exercise the right to self-determination, nor can she enjoy the right to economic resources in its fullest sense or obtain and maintain good health. All of these rights are interdependent and interactive and embrace a cluster of both civil and political as well as socio-economic rights.

The significance of Vienna is that it not only affirmed the universality and the indivisibility of rights for all, but that global consensus was achieved that these concepts apply equally to women. The Fourth World Conference on Women must further this understanding. Historically, arguments of culture, religion, and tradition in particular have been used to deny women their rights. But the Vienna conference stressed the importance of "working towards the elimination of gender bias in the administration of justice and the eradication of any conflicts which may arise between the rights of women and the harmful effects of certain traditional and customary practices, cultural prejudices, and religious extremism."

Furthermore, the Vienna Declaration pointed out that "gender based violence and all forms of sexual harassment and exploitation, including those resulting from cultural prejudice and international trafficking are incompatible with the dignity and the worth of the human person and must be eliminated." This cannot be done unless states make a clear commitment in Beijing to the concept of the universality of rights, and to establishing mechanisms that will guarantee the eradication of all forms of discrimination against women, regardless of the contrary demands of culture, tradition, and religious fundamentalism.

Above all, women have been denied the right to value themselves. Thus, they have been denied the right to their own voice and to negotiate their own advancement. Advances in women's status cannot be sustained in the absence of this self-reliance and the social, political, and legislative frameworks within which women can legitimately negotiate their positions and rights at the personal and societal levels.

Women must represent themselves collectively and individually, and the Beijing Platform for Action must obligate governments to make concrete provisions for them to do so by acknowledging that the social arrangements through which the physical needs of human beings are met has disadvantaged women and denied them the capacity for self-representation and choice. The past two decades of development for women have also been flawed in that women's productive roles have been promoted with very little change in their responsibility for reproductive functions. In this sense, equal opportunity for women without a recognition that women's interests and needs are different from those of men has not advanced the cause of women. The human right of women to exercise choice and be agents of economic development has to be legitimized in Beijing on the arguments of justice and not on those of efficiency or on the instrumental use of women's labour. These arguments will only serve to force women into exercising choice according to male patterns of behaviour and will therefore subvert justice. As Naila Kabeer, author of *Reversed Realities: Gender, Hierarchy, and Development Thought* has pointed out, "men's rationality and response to incentives is only possible because of women's concern with reproduction." The challenge in Beijing is to promote equality between women and men without confusing it with equal treatment.

This means that we must promote women's right to have a voice and create a culture of democracy and equality which facilitates choices for women, and guaranteeing the full and equal citizenship of women at the public and private levels. We need to address the questions of women's lack of power, their low political representation, and their exclusion from institutions of power and decision-making. Rights for women are inalienable also at the level of the family or the private sphere and are indivisible from their rights in the public sphere. A woman's status within the family and the recognition of her right to personal autonomy will determine her right to full citizenship and economic, political, and social capability at the public level. The Beijing Platform for Action must recognize this and must be a holistic document committed to eradicating all ideological, institutional, and material barriers to the advancement of women.

The right to development

In Vienna, global consensus was also achieved that "the right to development is inalienable, universal, and a fundamental part of human rights." However, the Vienna Declaration also cautions that, "while development facilitates the enjoyment of all human rights, the lack of development may not be invoked to justify the abridgement of internationally recognized rights." It also urges the international community to promote effective cooperation in order to fulfil the right to development.

Acknowledgment of the right to autonomy, choice, and equality will become a hollow political victory if the economic environment merely bestows further privilege upon the powerful and promotes growth at the expense of human well-being.

The Vienna Declaration goes on to address the issues of poverty, stating that "the existence of widespread poverty inhibits the full and effective enjoyment of human rights. Its alleviation and elimination must remain high priorities for the international community."

In reaffirming people's right to development, the Vienna Declaration has prepared the ground for transforming people from playing the passive role of beneficiary to becoming active claimants with certain undeniable entitlements. This has implications at many levels. When development becomes a right, it forces the setting of standards, a basic minimum. Falling below this becomes an abrogation of the rights of the individual or the community. It also implies that a specific person or body has the responsibility to fulfil the right and that one is entitled to a means of redress and to enforce accountability if this obligation is not fulfilled.

The right-to-development framework should underscore all efforts to address the issues of poverty and economic empowerment among women. The Beijing Platform for Action should reflect the international community's commitment to positively address all relevant issues of macro-economic policy, such as structural adjustment and debt alleviation, in the interests of creating a favourable international economic environment. This is critical for women, as the disproportionate disadvantages they face as a result of structural adjustment programmes has been well documented. Acknowledging women's right to autonomy, choice, and equality will become a hollow political victory if the economic environment merely bestows further privilege upon the powerful and promotes growth at the expense of human well-being.

Mechanisms for accountability

It is now a universally accepted principle that human rights should have the protection of the community of nations. This is evidenced by the range of international instruments, declarations, and covenants. What this implies is that the primary responsibility for the protection of human rights lies with governments and that governments are willing to subject themselves to accountability and scrutiny at the international level.

Where does this leave the question of national sovereignty? Vallejo points out that "the development of international human rights law has led to the acceptance of a fundamental principle of the primacy of international norms over domestic legislation and national constitutions. From the legal point of view human rights are a limitation on the political power of states." The Vienna Declaration reflects this philosophy. It states that the "processes of promoting and protecting human rights should be conducted in conformity with the purpose and principle of the Charter of the United Nations, and international law."

Given current thinking on the international community's responsibility to safeguard the human rights of individuals, no state can afford to fall back on the argument of a right to national sovereignty. To paraphrase from UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali's opening statement at the Vienna conference, if a state's action defies the norms of internationally recognized human rights, it defies the conscience of the international community.

Respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms require that states put in place mechanisms for redress and accountability, through law and policy measures. With respect to women's rights it is essential, as recommended in the Vienna Declaration, that such mechanisms also be integrated into the mainstream activities of the entire UN system.

The Vienna Declaration urges governments to incorporate standards as contained in international human rights instruments into domestic legislation and to strengthen national structures, institutions, and organs of society which play a role in promoting and safeguarding human rights. But many governments have not done so. Some are even reluctant to eradicate discrimination against women as it exists in domestic legislation because it is seen as a political issue. The Beijing Platform for Action needs to ensure that the law becomes an empowering tool for women within the family and in civil matters. The Platform for Action must stress the importance of the universal ratification of the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and coming to a consensus on challenging governments that place reservations on the principles of equality and non-discrimination on which the Convention is based. Guaranteeing human rights means that there have to be juridical controls to punish violations. The proposed optional protocol to the Convention endorsed in Vienna needs strong support in Beijing. At the UN level there should be a commitment to strengthen the institutional backing for CEDAW so that they can effectively monitor its implementation.

Women must represent themselves collectively and individually. Advances in their status cannot be sustained without self-reliance.

We are still grappling with issues such as the setting of standards, developing the mechanisms for redress or to deal with the many forms of violence perpetrated against women. The violation of rights perpetrated or sponsored by the state on the basis of its material and legal power remains a highly contentious issue. Striving to arrive at conceptual clarity, establishing common principles to assess violations, and creating the mechanisms for accountability at national and international levels is therefore of crucial importance. Although these mechanisms will have to evolve constantly, there can be no doubt that national, regional, and international NGOs working to promote respect for human rights must be strengthened by the Beijing Platform for Action.

Richard Mock

Even if international mechanisms exist to defend human rights, it is clear that there are still no means to physically enforce human rights law. Its observance depends on the good faith and political will of states. Pressure at national and international levels can play a very significant role, however, as no government likes to be consistently and systematically accused of violations.

Women's Empowerment

"Why is women's participation so important?" ask the authors of *Women and Empowerment: Participation and Decision Making*. "In the first place, there can be no true democracy, no true people's participation in governance and development without the equal participation of women and men in all spheres of life and levels of decision-making. Second, the goals of development cannot be attained without women's full participation not only in the development process, but also in shaping its goals. And third, women's participation is changing the world in which we live by bringing new priorities and perspectives to the political process and the organization of society. In focusing attention on the most neglected portion of humanity today, women and girls, women's participation will make society more responsive to the needs of all people." The book, cobbled from contributions from more than a hundred individuals and organizations, was put together by Marilee Karl, a co-founder and honorary president of Isis International. Beyond offering its view of what participation and empowerment are and can be, the book sets out to promote women's participation whether at the grassroots, national, or international levels. Published by Zed Books under its Women & World Development Series, the book looks at the growing involvement of women in different organizations, politics, public life, development programmes, and international decision-making and sets out to examine the strategies, mechanisms, and tools that women are using to empower themselves. Other titles in the series include *Women and the World Economic Crisis; Women and Disability; Women and Health; Women and the Environment; Refugee Women; Women and Literacy; Women and Human Rights; Women and the Family*; and *Women and Work*. For more information, contact: Zed Books Ltd., 7 Cynthia Street, London N1 9JF, UK. Or: 165 First Avenue, Atlantic Highlands, NJ 07716, USA.

Agenda-setting Guide

"To interact effectively with the international policy-setting and decision-making process that UN world conferences represent, it is important to understand how resolutions are drafted, how caucuses are formed, and how to work with the media," according to the UN Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) and the UN Non-Governmental Liaison Service (NGLS), publishers of *Putting Gender on the Agenda: A Guide to Participating in UN World Conferences*. The free handbook sets out to provide specific and practical information on how UN conferences operate and how non-governmental organizations can enhance their participation in them. Copies are available from: UNIFEM, 304 East 45th Street, New York, NY 10017, USA. Tel.: (212) 906-6400. Fax: (212) 906-6705. And: NGLS, Room 6015, 866 UN Plaza, New York, NY 10017, USA. Tel.: (212) 963-3125. Fax: (212) 963-8712.

Women's Human Rights

Human Rights of Women: National and International Perspectives sets out to explore the ways in which the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women and the various provisions and institutions of international human rights law could be used effectively to ensure women's equality, protection, and individual dignity. The book, edited by Rebecca J. Cook of the University of Toronto's Faculty of Law, covers such topics as the definition, history, and future course of women's international human rights law; women, ethnicity, and the discourse of rights; the relationship between state sovereignty and women's international human rights law; state responsibility under international human rights law to change religious and customary laws; the impact of structural adjustment programmes on women's rights; reproductive rights; the use of the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights to secure women's access to land; and the use of international human rights norms to combat violence against women. Published in hardback, priced at US$54.95, and paperback, priced at US$21.95, by: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1300 Blockley Hall, 418 Services Drive, Philadelphia, PA 19104-6097, USA. Tel.: (800) 445-9880. In Europe, contact: Academic and University Publishers Group, One Gower Street, London WC1E 6HA, UK.

Motherhood and Impoverishment

"In the future, being a mother may be the most important factor disposing women to poverty unless women's family roles are more fully valued and responsibility for children is more equitably balanced between men and women." So says Judith Bruce, co-author of *Families in Focus: New Perspectives on Mothers, Fathers, and Children*. The report sets out to compile and analyze data from around the world and concludes that many accepted notions of the family are myths. Among these myths: that the family is a stable

and cohesive unit; that children live with their mother and father; that fathers serve as economic providers; that mothers serve as emotional care-givers; and that all children in a family are treated equally and well. In light of their findings, the authors call for a new look at policies affecting families. In their words: "While broader social and economic development policy may enable individual men and women—the majority of whom will become both parents and workers—to produce and reproduce with satisfaction, the distinctive mandate of family policy is to support key family relationships that are not automatically served by the expansion of individual rights and economic opportunities. Given children's inherent vulnerability, the parent-child bond is the family relationship most in need of policy attention. If this link were better supported, key elements of women's empowerment and gender equity agendas would also be served: fair wages and labour market opportunities for parents, a more equitable balance of male and female responsibilities for children, affordable and safe child care, and economic security for custodial parents after divorce and widowhood." But since families come in many forms, they add: "Thoughtful family policy must be designed with an eye to the heterogeneity of families and to the mutability of marital and parental arrangements." For more information, contact: The Population Council, One Dag Hammarskjold Plaza, New York, NY 10017, USA. Tel.: (212) 339-0500. Fax: (212) 755-6052.

Women and HIV/AIDS

Women and HIV/AIDS: An International Resource Book sets out to present a decade of knowledge and experience regarding the impact of HIV/AIDS on women's health, sexual relationships, and reproductive rights. Edited by Marge Berer with Sunanda Ray, the book is intended for a wide range of readers. It is published in English by Pandora Press (HarperCollins UK) and in French and Spanish by the Women and HIV/AIDS Book Project in association with AHRTAG, the Appropriate Health Resources and Technologies Action Group, and *Reproductive Health Matters*. It is available through bookstores. For information about discount rates and free copies, which may be available to groups in developing countries, contact: (for developing countries) TALC, P.O. Box 49, St. Albans, Herts AL1 4AX, UK. Or: (for Australia/New Zealand, Europe, and North America) Women and HIV/AIDS Book, 1 London Bridge Street, London SE1 9SG, UK.

UNFPA's Role

Gender, Population, and Development: The Role of the United Nations Population Fund sets out to provide "a global summary of progress toward gender equity and equality and a region-by-region survey of UNFPA's role in promoting it," according to the report's publisher, UNFPA's Gender Population and Development Branch. The report outlines the International Conference on Population and Development's recommendations on the matter and UNFPA's response to date. Available in English, French, and Spanish. For more information, contact: Gender, Population, and Development Branch, Technical and Evaluation Division, UNFPA, 220 East 42nd Street, New York, NY 10017, USA. Tel.: (212) 297-5141. Fax: (212) 297-4915.

African Women's Network

Representatives of some 20 African women's organizations have formed AWEPON, the African Women's Economic Policy Network, in order to provide a forum for discussion, analysis, and dissemination of information about existing economic policies, especially structural adjustment, and how they affect women in Africa. AWEPON also aims to put forward women's alternatives to these policies. With regional coordinators in Morocco, Guinea-Bissau, Senegal, and Zimbabwe, the Network's overall coordinator is Julia Mulaha, director of the women's programme at the National Council of Churches of Kenya, P.O. Box 45009, Nairobi, Kenya. Tel.: 254-2-338-211. Fax: 254-2-224-463.

Money for Women's Groups

Information on possible sources of funding for women's non-governmental organizations is provided in *Women Share*, a newsletter published by the International Women's Tribune Center, 777 UN Plaza, New York, NY 10017, USA. Telephone: (212) 687-8633.

Reproductive Realities

Private Decisions, Public Debate: Women, Reproduction, and Population is a collection of in-depth reports by women journalists from around the world that set out to expose the social realities which constrain or enhance most women's opportunities to control their reproductive lives. For more information, contact: Panos London, 9 White Lion Street, London N1 9PD, UK. Fax: (44-171) 278-0345.

Sex or gender... Equality or equity... Reproductive or sexual rights...

What are they talking about?

A glossary of oft-used and hotly-debated terms. They look and sound like words we're familiar with, but do they have a meaning all their own in the conference vernacular?

Sex

Generally, the word sex refers to biology and anatomy. People are said to be of the male or female sex, as determined by three sets of characteristics: external sex organs, internal sex organs, and secondary sexual development at puberty (breasts or beards, and so on). This word is also used to mean sexual intercourse or activity.

Gender

The word gender refers to a set of qualities and behaviours expected from a female or male by their society. A person's gender behaviour is believed to be affected by social or cultural expectations, which come from the idea that certain qualities and therefore roles are "natural" for women while others are "natural" for men. These roles are learned, change over time, and vary widely within and between cultures.

Equality

Equality embodies the principles of equal rights, status, and mutual respect between men and women. It is usually used to mean the state of being equal.

Equity

Usually, equity is used to mean the process by which equality is achieved: the application of the principles of justice to correct or remove those aspects of society that create or enforce inequality and supplement or emphasize those aspects that promote equality.

Reproductive rights

In the words of the Programme of Action adopted at last year's International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD), reproductive rights refers to "the basic right of all couples and individuals to decide freely and responsibly the number, spacing, and timing of their children and to have the information and means to do so, and the right to attain the highest standard of sexual and reproductive health. It also includes their right to make decisions concerning reproduction free of discrimination, coercion, and violence, as expressed in human rights documents."

Sexual rights

Sexual rights refer to the freedom of each individual to decide when, if, with whom, and how she/he wants to express her/his sexuality. Sexual rights are to date not explicitly referred to in official UN documents, but are implicit in a variety of established basic human rights, including the right to freedom from coercion and violence in sexual relations. The concept of sexual rights was not taken up in the ICPD Programme of Action because of opposition from some UN member states during the negotiations.

Sources: Mackenzie, L., *On Our Feet: Taking Steps to Challenge Women's Oppression*, University of Western Cape, South Africa, CACE publications, 1993; Reysoo, F., et al, eds., *Everything you always wanted to know...Lexicon and Comments on the New Population Concepts from a Gender Perspective*, Network of Women in Development Agencies, Oegstgeest, 1994; *Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development*, United Nations, 1994; UNFPA, *Incorporating Women Into Population and Development: Knowing Why and Knowing How.*

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